

At home Royce crowed to his father who smiled and pushed a button to reveal them all, a cast of thousands with his money in their sweaty hands.

Royce was crushed. He wanted to kill himself and be buried in potter's field. His dad gave him a platinum gun with his name on it, then showed a film of his funeral, a get-together that made "The Feast of Paradise" look like a Kappa Sig beer blast.

Royce sighed, picked up a pen, and got down to work.

#### MY UNCLE MAX

lived by himself in a little place on Blythe St., not far from the waterworks. He was my mother's brother, the baby of the family. I was an only child, oldest and youngest at the same time.

My mother wanted us both to settle down, she must have said it a million times. I knew it meant practicing the piano or reading Longfellow, anything but bouncing a ball off the side of the house. Uncle Max knew it meant some nice girl my mother had dug up. "But Ada," he'd say, "I don't want a nice girl," and she would be just as shocked every time and my father would smile a little and tuck himself into the evening Star.

Uncle Max could do anything with cars; his name was on the lips of every Kaiser owner for 50 miles. He liked his work and went at it 7 days a week rain or shine until one winter he took sick. My mother nursed him and while she had him down talked about who would do this next time because she certainly wouldn't be around forever and there he'd be in that drafty shack all by himself and she knew this girl.

She must have scared Uncle Max good because when he was up and around he married Iris Wood who had worked down at the cleaners for as long as I could remember.

Iris took to marriage, she got a phone and sent Max to the store. When he wasn't eating Del Monte green beans and Underwood sandwiches, he dove into the alligator mouths of Packards and stayed there until one day he went to St. Louis for some parts and came back with a woman.

They were out at the Moonlight Motel for almost two weeks and then I heard that the woman had run off. I knew what that meant but I pictured her pounding down the hard road anyway, her tits bouncing.

Dad took me with him to get Uncle Max even though my mother thought I was too young. I had never seen the inside of a motel room before. There was a bed with the sheets piled in the middle like the last of a snowman. There were bottles all over and boxes of Pangburns.

Max went back to Iris and his yard full of cars, but he wasn't worth a damn. He had lost his touch and his business amounted to nothing but oil changes and inner tubes.

My father had to give them money to make ends meet and once when he came back from there my mother said it was a shame what had happened to Max, how he had married that good for nothing Iris and made a fool of himself to boot.

My father put the paper down. He said she should drop the subject. Hadn't she done enough? Wasn't she satisfied? By God, he never wanted to hear another word about it, not ever.

He froze the room. He had never shouted in his life except for one other time when I came back from baseball. I had won the game and I said what a nice little town this was and that maybe I would just stay here forever.

## HOMETOWN

I don't go back much and when I do I don't get around. There's a little race track at the foot of the bluff, I watch some t.v and maybe for the

first time listen to my father who was beaten til the white showed, and my mother whose feet would have frozen if she hadn't stood where the cows had slept.

This house sits where those cows used to lie and I ask why they didn't just leave. "Roots, I guess. Nowadays you don't see it. Maybe that's good."

Occasionally I run into somebody down at the liquor store. We eye each other over the Ace combs and nail clippers and finally decide that under the hair or behind the gut is part of the class of '59. Last time it was a girl named Marti.